

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 EB-11 CIEP-02 ACDA-19

DRC-01 /169 W

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R 291222Z MAR 74

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5162

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 471

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, JO, IS

SUBJ: ISRAELI LAND PURCHASING ON WEST BANK

SUMMARY: REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED INDICATE NEW WAVE OF PRIVATE ISRAELI PURCHASING OF WEST BANK LAND IS IN PROGRESS. PROPERTY SAID TO BE INVOLVED IS ON PERIPHERY OF JERUSALEM, ESPECIALLY TO NORTHEAST. PURCHASERS ARE SAID TO BE PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS OR FIRMS. ROLE OF ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS UNCLEAR. UNFORTUNATELY, WHATEVER ROLE MAY BE, EFFECT WILL BE TO DISCOURAGE MODERATE ARAB ELEMENTS AND ENCOURAGE IMMODERATE TENDENCIES. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING LONG CONVERSATION WITH US MARCH 28, EAST JERUSALEM NOTABLE ANWAR KHATIB MENTIONED THAT PRIVATE ISRAELIS WERE AGAIN PURCHASING LAND IN LARGE AMOUNTS ON WEST BANK AROUND PERIPHERY OF JERUSALEM. HE SAID THAT MAIN AREA AFFECTED WAS HILL COUNTRY NORTHEAST OF CITY AROUND VILLAGES OF ANATA, HISMA, AND JABA. THIS CRITICAL AREA CONSTITUTING CORRIDOR FROM JERUSALEM IN DIRECTION OF JERICHO AND JORDAN RIVER. ACCORDING TO KHABIT, MUCH OF LAND IN THAT AREA HAD COME INTO ISRAELI HANDS IN THIS NEW WAVE OF PURCHASING. HE SAID HE HAD DETAILED INFORMATION.
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TION ON PLOTS OF LAND INVOLVED AND ARAB SELLERS, BUT HE

ASSUMED MAJORITY OF TRANSACTIONS HAD ESCAPED HIS NOTICE BY BEING CARRIED OUT UNDER SOME SORT OF COVER. HE BELIEVED SAME METHODS WERE BEING USED AS IN WAVE OF PURCHASING YEAR AGO, MAINLY IRREVOCABLE POWERS OF ATTORNEY.

2. KHATIB SAID HE HAD CONTACTED ARABS IN THAT VICINITY TO URGE THEM NOT TO SELL PROPERTY. HE DEPLORED FACT THAT MOST OF SALES WERE BEING MADE BY ARABS ACTUALLY RESIDENT IN AREA, AS DISTINCT FROM SELLING WHICH WAS ALSO GOING ON NEAR BEIT JALA TO THE SOUTH WHERE SELLERS GENERALLY LIVED ABROAD. ISRAELI POLICE MINISTER HILLEL HAD WARNED HIM THAT HE WAS THREATENING ARABS NOT TO SELL LAND, AN ACT WHICH HILLEL DESCRIBED AS CRIMINAL. KHATIB QUOTED HILLEL AS SAYING THAT ISRAELIS WOULD NORMALLY PUT SOMEONE IN JAIL FOR THIS BUT GIVEN HIS PROMINENCE THEY WOULD NOT DO SO.

3. KHATIB'S REPORT OF LAND SALES WAS CONFIRMED TO US SAME DAY BY HA'ARETZ REPORTER LITANI, CORRESPONDENT WHO HAD DONE MAJORITY OF COVERAGE ON LAND SALES QUESTION YEAR AGO. LITANI SAID HE THOUGHT NEW WAVE WAS ONLY JUST COMMENCING. IT INVOLVED LAND ON ENTIRE PERIPHERY OF JERUSALEM FROM KALANDIA TO BEIT JALA, BOTH EAST AND WEST. PRICES WERE RUNNING 35 TO 50,000 ISRAELI POUNDS PER DUNUM (ROUGHLY SAME AMOUNT OF DOLLARS PER ACRE). PURCHASES WERE BY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS AND SOME ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS BUILDING FIRM SHIKUNIM OVDIM. LITANI SAID HE WAS DOING ARTICLE WHICH WOULD APPEAR SHORTLY IN HA'ARETZ.

4. COMMENT: WE ARE INCLINED TO CREDIT REPORT, PARTICULARLY GIVEN LITANI'S CONFIRMATION. REASONS FOR RECOMMENCEMENT OF LARGE-SCALE PURCHASING JUST AT THIS TIME ARE NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR BUT ARE INTERESTING TO SPECULATE ON. PRESUMABLY HOPE OF PRIVATE GAIN IS INVOLVED, AS WAS CASE LAST YEAR THOUGH WE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT INVESTORS MIGHT BE WARY OF BUYING LAND ON WEST BANK IN FACE OF LIKELY PEACE SETTLEMENT MOVES. CLEARER MOTIVE FOR PURCHASES UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD SEEM TO BE ON PART OF ISRAELI STATE ITSELF TO PREEMPT NEGOTIATIONS BY HAVING LAND ACQUIRED THAT THEY WOULD WANT TO SEE REMAIN WITH ISRAEL IN ANY SETTLEMENT. AREAS IN QUESTION, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD BE LEFT WITH ISRAEL UNDER ALLON PLAN. WE WOULD THINK SOME GOVERNMENTAL

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PROMPTING COULD NOT BE RULED OUT, OR AT LEAST ASSURANCES TO PRIVATE INVESTORS THAT THEY WOULD BE RECOMPENSED IF LAND WAS LOST IN SETTLEMENT (KHATIB SAID HE HAD HEARD OF SUCH ASSURANCES). WE RECALL THAT LABOUR PARTY POLICY PAPER FOR OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (GALILI DOCUMENT) PROVIDED IN PARA L-5 FOR APPROVAL OF LAND AND REAL ESTATE ACQUISITION BY COMPANIES AND PRIVATE PERSONS IN CASES WHERE ISRAEL LANDS AUTHORITY "IS UNABLE OR NOT INTERESTED IN SUCH PURCHASES." AT VERY LEAST, HILLEL'S WARNING

TO KHATIB INDICATES GOVERNMENTAL AWARENESS OF WHAT IS GOING ON.

5. WHATEVER THE MOTIVATION, ISRAELI PURCHASING OF LAND WHICH ARABS CONSIDER SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THEM IN A SETTLEMENT AND WHICH US CONSIDERS SHOULD AT LEAST BE SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATION HARDLY CONTRIBUTES TO ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL CONFIDENCE WHICH WILL BE NECESSARY IF WEST BANK/JERUSALEM PROBLEM IS TO BE COPEDED WITH. I WOULD THINK WE SHOULD TELL ISRAELIS THAT LAND PURCHASING IS VERY SORT OF THING THAT WILL WEAKEN RAB ELEMENTS THEY WOULD LIKE TO DEAL WITH ABOUT WEST BANK AND STRENGTHEN ELEMENTS THEY DO NOT WANT TO DEAL WITH.

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